



BEYOND DENOMINATION

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 Session 1 – December 5, 2023
 Antiquity through the Middle Ages

What is Judaism?

- What are its defining features?
- Do all those features need to be there for us to think of it as Judaism?

What kinds of things could cause a split into different streams?

- Non-religious factors (migration, isolation, assimilation)
- Religious factors – who runs things, who gets to interpret, who can participate (and are these in fact “religious factors?” or might they be political? or even pastoral?)
- Theological disagreements – different ideas about God and the role of God in our lives
- Engagement with the outside world vs. isolating

A Little History of Rabbinic (or Rabbinite) Judaism

- Israelite religion
- Babylonian Exile, 586 BCE – introduction of elements of Zoroastrianism and Babylonian culture
- Second Temple Period – fracturing along these lines:
 - Pharisees (*P'rushim*) – populist, Oral Torah, interpretation in the hands of the people
 - Saducees (*Tz'dukim*) – priestly run, elite, narrower interpretation of Torah
 - Essenes (*Isiyim*) – mystical sect
 - Zealots (*Kana'im*) – political movement to drive off Roman occupation

“Judaisms” that Spun Off Early (non-rabbinite)

- Lemba of South Africa and Zimbabwe
- Beta Israel of Ethiopia
- Samaritans (*Shomronim*)

Post-Exilic Split through Regionality

- Palestine
- Persia (and from there to China and India)
- Arabian Peninsula and Yemen (including Jewish kingdoms in antiquity)
- Absorption of Israelites exiled in the 8th Century BCE
- The *Rif* – Egypt, North Africa, Spain
- Mainland Greece (Romanote community)
- Italy
- Across the Alps into Ashkenaz

These geographical separations resulted in differences in language, outlook, food, and practice. And the rabbinite Jewish world stayed in communication, sharing liturgy and halachah..

Later Jewish Rejection of Talmud

- Karaite Jews